



## THE COUNTY OF KAUAI

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### News Release

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#### **KPD warns public to be aware of latest scams**

LĪHU'E — The Kaua'i Police Department is urging residents and businesses to be aware of the latest potential scams. Scammers are continuing to take advantage of the global COVID-19 crisis to steal money and personal information and Kaua'i police have been receiving numerous reports of various tactics being used.

The scam that has been generating the most recent leverage is related to unemployment and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits. Scammers are stealing people's identities and fraudulently filing for benefits. The scammers are then able to collect payments that are directly deposited into their bank accounts.

An additional tactic scammers are using pertaining to benefits includes influencing or coaxing people to send their money elsewhere.

"These people are called 'money mules,'" said Assistant Chief Bryson Ponce. "They are often victims of scams themselves and have to repay their own bank the money that they sent away per other scammers' directions, leaving them worse off."

Another recently reported scam involves people posing as representatives of the Hawai'i State Department of Health. A scammer will call a place of business and threaten to cite the establishment, such as a restaurant, for having a health code violation and request that the business send them money as a fine.



Witnesses have reported that one individual in particular, who has been posing as an official calling businesses, has a heavy accent and asks redundant questions that the state Department of Health would already have the answers to.

There are various other avenues that scammers are using to get their victims to provide personal information, such as email, phone calls and social media. These scammers try to gain the trust of their victims by using tactics such as:

- Posing as law enforcement and preying on people's fears.
- Enticing victims with romance.
- Promising large payments of money.
- Suggesting computer repairs. A message will pop up on a victim's computer screen to call a number and scammers will pose as a computer repair person and request payment.

"More often than not, in these cases, victims never meet the scammers in person and most, if not all, tactics are via text or email. Some scammers will speak with the victims over the phone, but they will never meet in person," said Ponce. "These scammers will also sometimes threaten that there are people on island who will visit the victims if they do not follow their directions."

A common method these type of scammers will use to obtain money is to instruct victims to go to stores and purchase gift cards worth up to thousands of dollars. Or, they will instruct the victims to send money wires. The scammers will remain on the phone with the victims during the entire transaction.

"It is also common that once victims send money, a scammer will change their story or promise to keep contacting the victim for more money. They will then use other scammers to contact the victims and be very persistent," said Ponce. "We don't want community members who are already struggling during these unpredictable times to fall victim to any of these crimes

and we urge everyone to remain vigilant to these scams and any others that could potentially arise.”

Some helpful tips to avoid becoming a victim:

- Never give out personal information.
- Always vet the company that contacted you by doing your own research and calling the company for verification purposes.
- Be aware that law enforcement will never call and ask you for payment in lieu of having an arrest warrant issued in your name.
- Monitor your credit frequently. Check your bank, credit card and phone statements regularly.
- Do not answer or return calls from unknown numbers
- Be aware of suspicious payment methods.
- Use caution when responding to unsolicited calls, emails or unknown individuals on social networking sites.
- Help keep senior citizens safe as they are often targets for scam artists and tend to be more trusting of unknown individuals.
- Remember that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

In the event that you or a loved one fall victim to a scam and disclose personal information, immediately file a report with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), all credit reporting bureaus, the social security administration and your banks to inform them that your identity might be compromised.

If you suspect a scam, please call KPD Dispatch at 241-1711 and file an official police report. You can also leave an anonymous tip by calling Crime Stoppers Kaua'i at 246-8300 or by visiting [www.crimestopperskauai.org](http://www.crimestopperskauai.org).

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